

What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus for hands-free command and control of a dental imaging system having a display monitor, a microphone and a storage device storing a plurality of dental images corresponding to a selected dental patient, comprising:

a speech recognition unit which converts to electronic speech data a voice command received through the microphone to select one of the plurality of dental images for viewing; and

a command and control processor for the electronic speech data received from said speech recognition unit, wherein said command and control processor causes the selected dental image to be retrieved from the storage device and then displayed on the display monitor.

2. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein thumbnail representations of the plurality of dental images corresponding to the selected dental patient are displayed for selection by the user.

3. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the plurality of dental images include intra-oral images, panoramic dental images, FOTI images and periodontic images.

4. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein text, audio and video data are also stored in the storage device and available for selection to be displayed.

5. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the dental images are acquired from one of a dental computer connected device, video camera, digital scanner or X-ray storage device and stored in the storage device.

6. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the storage device is connected to a computer network.

5 7. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the storage device is remotely located and connected through a network.

8. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the command and control processor is remotely located and connected through a network.

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9. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the microphone is wireless.

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10. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein after the selected dental image is retrieved from the storage device and displayed on the display monitor, the command and control processor, in response to a second voice command received through the microphone and converted by said speech recognition unit, causes the selected dental image 20 to be further processed according to the second voice command.

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11. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein after the selected dental image is retrieved from the storage device and displayed on the display monitor, the command and control processor causes a voice interface through a speaker to provide a set of options, for selection by a user, for further processing the selected dental image.

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12. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the command and control processor causes a voice interface through a speaker to provide a voice prompt to guide a user through selection of an appropriate dental image.

13. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the speech recognition unit includes a hardware module electronically coupled to the command and control processor.

5        14. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the speech recognition unit comprises a client-server speech recognition system.

10        15. A dental imaging system, comprising:  
a microphone;  
a display monitor;  
a storage device, wherein the storage device stores a plurality of dental images corresponding to a selected dental patient; and  
15        a speech recognition command unit which converts to electronic speech data a voice command received through said microphone to select one of the plurality of dental images for viewing, and processes the electronic speech data to cause the selected dental image to be retrieved  
20        from said storage device and then displayed on said display monitor.

16. The system of claim 15, wherein the microphone is wireless.

25        17. A method of hands-free command and control of a dental imaging system, comprising the steps of:  
converting to electronic speech data a voice command from a user through a microphone to select for viewing one of a plurality of dental images stored in a storage device for a selected dental patient; and  
30        processing the electronic speech data to cause the selected dental image to be retrieved from the storage device and then displayed on a display monitor.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein the microphone is wireless.